

## **MINDSET: THE NEW PSYCHOLOGY OF SUCCESS BY CAROL S. DWECK**

Mindset by Carol Dweck is a psychological examination of two different mindsets; the fixed mindset and the growth mindset. She discusses how these come into play and how they effect our lives. Deck's book goes into detail about how mindsets can be applied to all areas of life from schooling, work, relationships and parenting. At the end of each chapter, Dweck has leading questions and tips on how you can grow your own mindset. A must-read for anyone looking to expand themselves, grow and learn.

### **THE MINDSETS**

#### **The fixed mindset**

Believing that your qualities are carved in stone—the fixed mindset—creates an urgency to prove yourself over and over. If you have only a certain amount of intelligence, a certain personality, and a certain moral character—well, then you'd better prove that you have a healthy dose of them. It simply wouldn't do to look or feel deficient in these most basic characteristics.

So many people have this one consuming goal of proving themselves—in the classroom, in their careers, and in their relationships. Every situation calls for a confirmation of their intelligence, personality, or character. Every situation is evaluated: Will I succeed or fail? Will I look smart or dumb? Will I be accepted or rejected? Will I feel like a winner or a loser?

#### **The growth mindset**

There's another mindset in which these traits are not simply a hand you're dealt and have to live with, always trying to convince yourself and others that you have a royal flush when you're secretly worried it's a pair of tens. In this mindset, the hand you're dealt is just the starting point for development. This growth mindset is based on the belief that your basic qualities are things you can cultivate through your efforts. Although people may differ in every which way—in their initial talents and aptitudes, interests, or temperaments—everyone can change and grow through application and experience.

Do people with this mindset believe that anyone can be anything, that anyone with proper motivation or education can become Einstein or Beethoven? No, but they believe that a person's true potential is unknown (and unknowable); that it's impossible to foresee what can be accomplished with years of passion, toil, and training.

The passion for stretching yourself and sticking to it, even (or especially) when it's not going well, is the hallmark of the growth mindset. This is the mindset that allows people to thrive during some of the most challenging times in their lives.

## **SO, WHAT'S NEW?**

Is this such a novel idea? We have lots of sayings that stress the importance of risk and the power of persistence, such as “Nothing ventured, nothing gained” and “If at first you don't succeed, try, try again.”

What is truly amazing is that people with the fixed mindset would not agree. For them, it's “Nothing ventured, nothing lost.” “If at first you don't succeed, you probably don't have the ability.”

In other words, risk and effort are two things that might reveal your inadequacies and show that you were not up to the task. In fact, it's startling to see the degree to which people with the fixed mindset do not believe in effort.

### **Effort**

When we teach people the growth mindset, with its focus on development, these ideas about challenge and effort follow. Similarly, it's not just that some people happen to dislike challenge and effort. When we (temporarily) put people in a fixed mindset, with its focus on permanent traits, they quickly fear challenge and devalue effort.

## **WHO HAS ACCURATE VIEWS OF THEIR ASSETS AND LIMITATIONS?**

If, like those with the growth mindset, you believe you can develop yourself, then you're open to accurate information about your current abilities, even if it's unflattering. What's more, if you're oriented toward learning, as they are, you need accurate information about your current abilities in order to learn effectively. However, if everything is either good news or bad news about your precious traits—

as it is with fixed-mindset people—distortion almost inevitably enters the picture. Some outcomes are magnified, others are explained away, and before you know it you don't know yourself at all.

## **INSIDE THE MINDSETS**

When you enter a mindset, you enter a new world.

In one world—the world of fixed traits—success is about proving you're smart or talented. Validating yourself.

In the other—the world of changing qualities—it's about stretching yourself to learn something new. Developing yourself.

In one world, failure is about having a setback. Getting a bad grade. Losing a tournament. Getting fired. Getting rejected. It means you're not smart or talented.

In the other world, failure is about not growing. Not reaching for the things you value. It means you're not fulfilling your potential.

In one world, effort is a bad thing. It, like failure, means you're not smart or talented. If you were, you wouldn't need effort.

In the other world, effort is what makes you smart or talented.

You have a choice. Mindsets are just beliefs. They're powerful beliefs, but they're just something in your mind, and you can change your mind.

### **An end to learning?**

As soon as children become able to evaluate themselves, some of them become afraid of challenges. They become afraid of not being smart.

We offered four-year-olds a choice: They could redo an easy jigsaw puzzle or they could try a harder one. Even at this tender age, children with the fixed mindset—the ones who believed in fixed traits—stuck with the safe one.

Children with the growth mindset—the ones who believed you could get smarter—thought it was a strange choice. They chose one hard one after another. "I'm dying to figure them out!" exclaimed one little girl.

So children with the fixed mindset want to make sure they succeed. Smart people should always succeed. But for children with the growth mindset, success is about stretching themselves. It's about becoming smarter.

This is how the fixed mindset makes people into nonlearners.

### **Stretching**

People in a growth mindset don't just seek challenge, they thrive on it. The bigger the challenge, the more they stretch. And nowhere can it be seen more clearly than in the world of sports. You can just watch people stretch and grow.

Clearly, people with the growth mindset thrive when they're stretching themselves. When do people with the fixed mindset thrive? When things are safely within their grasp. If things get too challenging —when they're not feeling smart or talented— they lose interest.

### **WHEN DO YOU FEEL SMART?**

for in the fixed mindset it's not enough just to succeed. It's not enough just to look smart and talented. You have to be pretty much flawless. And you have to be flawless right away.

Actually, people with the fixed mindset expect ability to show on its own, before any learning takes place.

### **POTENTIAL**

This leads us back to the idea of "potential" and to the question of whether tests or experts can tell us what our potential is, what we're capable of, what our future will be. The fixed mindset says yes. You can simply measure the fixed ability right now and project it into the future. Just give the test or ask the expert.

But isn't potential someone's capacity to develop their skills with effort over time? And that's just the point. How can we know where effort and time will take someone?

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### **Failed or failure?**

The idea that one evaluation can measure you forever is what creates the urgency for those with the fixed mindset. That's why they must succeed perfectly and immediately. Who can afford the luxury of trying to grow when everything is on the line right now?

Each April when the skinny envelopes—the rejection letters—arrive from colleges, countless failures are created coast to coast. Thousands of brilliant young scholars become “The Girl Who Didn't Get into Princeton” or the “The Boy Who Didn't Get into Stanford.”

### **Defining moments**

Even in the growth mindset, failure can be a painful experience. But it doesn't define you. It's a problem to be faced, dealt with, and learned from.

Instead of letting a failing experience define them, people with the growth mind set will take control of it. Use it to become a better at the skill or task or sport and, to become, a better person.

### **Shirk, cheat, blame: not a recipe for success**

Beyond how traumatic a setback can be in the fixed mindset, this mindset gives you no good recipe for overcoming it. If failure means you lack competence or potential—that you are a failure—where do you go from there?

What's more, instead of trying to learn from and repair their failures, people with the fixed mindset may simply try to repair their self-esteem. For example, they may go looking for people who are even worse off than they are.

Another way people with the fixed mindset try to repair their self-esteem after a failure is by assigning blame or making excuses.

In short, when people believe in fixed traits, they are always in danger of being measured by a failure. It can define them in a permanent way. Smart or talented as they may be, this mindset seems to rob them of their coping resources. When

people believe their basic qualities can be developed, failures may still hurt, but failures don't define them. And if abilities can be expanded—if change and growth are possible—then there are still many paths to success.

## **HIGH EFFORT: THE BIG RISK**

From the point of view of the fixed mindset, effort is only for people with deficiencies. And when people already know they're deficient, they have nothing to lose by trying. But if your claim to fame is not having any deficiencies—if you're considered a genius, a talent, or a natural—then you have a lot to lose. Effort can reduce you.

Why is effort so terrifying? There are two reasons. One is that in the fixed mindset, great geniuses are not supposed to need it. So just needing it casts a shadow on your ability. The second is that, it robs you of all your excuses. Without effort, you can always say, "I could have been [fill in the blank]." But once you try, you can't say that anymore.

## **LOW EFFORT: THE BIG RISK**

In the growth mindset, it's almost inconceivable to want something badly, to think you have a chance to achieve it, and then do nothing about it. When it happens, the I could have been is heartbreaking, not comforting.

Billie Jean King says it's all about what you want to look back and say. I agree with her. You can look back and say, "I could have been ...," polishing your unused endowments like trophies. Or you can look back and say, "I gave my all for the things I valued." Think about what you want to look back and say. Then choose your mindset.

## **ACHIEVEMENTS**

The fixed mindset limits achievement. It fills people's minds with interfering thoughts, it makes effort disagreeable, and it leads to inferior learning strategies. What's more, it makes other people into judges instead of allies. Whether we're talking about Darwin or college students, important achievements require a clear

focus, all-out effort, and a bottomless trunk full of strategies. Plus allies in learning. This is what the growth mindset gives people, and that's why it helps their abilities grow and bear fruit.

### **Is artistic ability a gift?**

Here's what this means: Just because some people can do something with little or no training, it doesn't mean that others can't do it (and sometimes do it even better) with training. This is so important, because many, many people with the fixed mindset think that someone's early performance tells you all you need to know about their talent and their future.

Can anyone do anything? I don't really know. However, I think we can now agree that people can do a lot more than first meets the eye.

## **CHARACTER, HEART, WILL & THE MIND OF A CHAMPION**

It goes by different names, but it's the same thing. It's what makes you practice, and it's what allows you to dig down and pull it out when you most need it.

People with the growth mind-set don't think they are special people, born with the right to win. They are people who work hard, who learn how to keep their focus under pressure, and who stretch beyond their ordinary abilities when they have to.

Ability can get you to the top, but it takes character to keep you there.

Those with the growth mindset are the ones who show the most character or heart. They are the ones who had the minds of champions.

### **Findings**

1. Those with the growth mindset find success in doing their best, in learning and improving. And this is exactly what we find in the sporting champions.
2. Those with the growth mindset find setbacks motivating. They're informative. They're a wake-up call.
3. People with the growth mindset in sports (as in pre-med chemistry) take charge of the processes that bring success—and that maintain it.

## **BUSINESS: MINDSET AND LEADERSHIP**

Jim Collins set out to discover what made some companies move from being good to being great. What was it that allowed them to make the leap to greatness—and stay there—while other, comparable companies just held steady at good?

There were several important factors, but one that was absolutely key was the type of leader who in every case led the company into greatness. These were not the larger-than-life, charismatic types who oozed ego and self-proclaimed talent. They were self-effacing people who constantly asked questions and had the ability to confront the most brutal answers—that is, to look failures in the face, even their own, while maintaining faith that they would succeed in the end.

Does this sound familiar? Collins wonders why his effective leaders have these particular qualities. And why these qualities go together the way they do. And how these leaders came to acquire them. But we know. They have the growth mindset. They believe in human development.

### **Leadership and the fixed mindset**

Fixed-mindset leaders, like fixed-mindset people in general, live in a world where some people are superior and some are inferior. They must repeatedly affirm that they are superior, and the company is simply a platform for this.

Collins's comparison leaders were typically concerned with their “reputation for personal greatness”—so much so that they often set the company up to fail when their regime ended. As Collins puts it, “After all, what better testament to your own personal greatness than that the place falls apart after you leave?”

### **Management**

Those with the fixed mindset believed that: “People have a certain fixed amount of management ability and they cannot do much to change it.” In contrast, those with the growth mindset believed: “People can always substantially change their basic skills for managing other people.”

Managers with a growth mindset think it's nice to have talent, but that's just the starting point. These managers are more committed to their employees' development, and to their own. They give a great deal more developmental coaching, they notice improvement in employees' performance, and they welcome critiques from their employees. Most exciting, the growth mindset can be taught to managers.

### **Teaching a mindset**



What does this mean? First, it means that our best bet is not simply to hire the most talented managers we can find and turn them loose, but to look for managers who also embody a growth mindset: a zest for teaching and learning, an openness to giving and receiving feedback, and an ability to confront and surmount obstacles.

It also means we need to train leaders, managers, and employees to believe in growth, in addition to training them in the specifics of effective communication and mentoring. Indeed, a growth mindset workshop might be a good first step in any major training program. Finally, it means creating a mindset environment in which people can thrive

### **Are leaders born or made?**

Many organizations believe in natural talent and don't look for people with the potential to develop. Not only are these organizations missing out on a big pool of possible leaders, but their belief in natural talent might actually squash the very people they think are the naturals, making them into arrogant, defensive nonlearners.

The lesson is: Create an organization that prizes the development of ability—and watch the leaders emerge.

## **CHANGING MINDSETS**

Just learning about the growth mindset can cause a big shift in the way people think about themselves and their lives.

Of course, people will have setbacks and disappointments, and sticking to the growth mindset may not always be easy. But just knowing it gives them another way to be. Instead of being held captive by some intimidating fantasy about the Great Writer, the Great Athlete, or the Great Genius, the growth mindset gives them courage to embrace their own goals and dreams. And more important, it gives them a way to work toward making them real.

### **But change is also hard**

When people hold on to a fixed mindset, it's often for a reason. At some point in their lives it served a good purpose for them. It told them who they were or who they wanted to be (a smart, talented child) and it told them how to be that (perform well). In this way, it provided a formula for self-esteem and a path to love and

respect from others. The idea that they are worthy and will be loved is crucial for children, and—if a child is unsure about being valued or loved—the fixed mindset appears to offer a simple, straightforward route to this.

Over time, the fixed traits may come to be the person's sense of who they are, and validating these traits may come to be the main source of their self-esteem.

Mindset change asks people to give this up. As you can imagine, it's not easy to just let go of something that has felt like your "self" for many years and that has given you your route to self esteem. And it's especially not easy to replace it with a mindset that tells you to embrace all the things that have felt threatening: challenge, struggle, criticism, setbacks.

### **Peresever**

It's not as though the fixed mindset wants to leave gracefully. If the fixed mindset has been controlling your internal monologue, it can say some pretty strong things to you when it sees those counters at zero: "You're nothing." It can make you want to rush right out and rack up some high numbers. The fixed mindset once offered you refuge from that very feeling, and it offers it to you again.

Don't take it. Then there's the concern that you won't be yourself anymore. It may feel as though the fixed mindset gave you your ambition, your edge, your individuality. Maybe you fear you'll become a bland cog in the wheel just like everyone else. Ordinary. But opening yourself up to growth makes you more yourself, not less. The growth-oriented scientists, artists, athletes, and CEOs we've looked at were far from humanoids going through the motions. They were people in the full flower of their individuality and potency.